

# The COVID-19 Safe Birthing Act

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## **Background:**

It is essential that we provide responsive, comprehensive health care to pregnant people across the nation in the midst of this crisis and beyond. The COVID-19 pandemic has created many severe, compounding challenges for pregnant people, particularly pregnant people of color. In this vulnerable time, no pregnant person should have to choose between the support of a family member and the support of a doula.

Before the pandemic, our nation was already experiencing a maternal health crisis. The U.S. has the highest rate of maternal mortality among developed countries, despite spending more money on healthcare than any other.

Pregnant people who contract COVID-19 are at greater risk for severe illness and death<sup>i</sup> and greater risk of pregnancy-related complications including preterm birth, emergency cesarean deliveries, and postpartum hemorrhaging.<sup>ii</sup> Restrictions put in place by hospitals and healthcare facilities because of the pandemic have resulted in people birthing alone and being isolated from their newborns during critical periods of postpartum bonding. Having a trusted advocate present to amplify their voices during medical appointments and during labor could save lives. The impact of birthing restrictions is harming pregnant people when they are most vulnerable.

## **The COVID-19 Safe Birthing Bill would provide critical protections and access to care for pregnant people during this public health crisis by:**

- Ensuring that hospitals and health care settings allow birthing individuals to be accompanied by a loved one, in addition to a doula or other birthing support professional.
- Expanding access to maternal telehealth services for Medicaid recipients.
- Extending Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program postpartum coverage to a full year.
- Ensuring that all pregnant persons, regardless of insurance status or source of insurance, have access to free COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccination during and after the emergency declaration period.

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<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control, "COVID-19 and Pregnancy," 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

<sup>ii</sup> National Institutes of Health, "Severe COVID-19 in pregnancy associated with preterm birth, other complications," Diana W. Bianchi, Thursday, January 28, 2021, <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/severe-covid-19-pregnancy-associated-preterm-birth-other-complications>.